

# 10 GREAT WAYS TO EMPOWER YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

by Bernadette Baynie



## Imagine yourself:

- at your desk and your boss walks into your office unexpectedly; or
- walking into a board meeting for an important presentation; or
- approaching a prospective client at their office premises; or
- sitting in a team meeting which is about to commence.

How do you look and carry yourself? What are your eyes, hands, feet and posture communicating to those around you? What sublime messages does your body language communicate to others, even before you speak?

**The famous management author, Peter F Drucker, once said: "The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't being said."**

Success, in both your personal and professional life, is driven by the quality of the relationships that you build around you. Great relationships depend upon communication to grow and flourish. Face to face communication is usually the most effective form of communication because it involves both verbal and non-verbal elements. Did you know that

both your body language and tone of voice (ie: your non-verbal communication), have a far greater impact on others than your words? UCLA's communication professor, Albert Mehrabian, studied face to face communication some years ago and found that:

- your words only account for 7% of your message,
- your tone of voice accounts for 38% of your message, and
- your body language accounted for a whopping 55 % of your message.

So, as you can see, your combined body language and tone of voice have a major impact upon the way you communicate with others. They can either help or hurt you, depending upon how you utilise them. The great thing is that if you use them well, people will be more willing to like and trust you and become more inclined to form longer term

relationships with you.

**Here are my top ten body language tips, which you can use to improve your communications and take your relationships to new levels:**

## 1. BE AUTHENTIC & ALIGNED

To convey the right message to others, make sure that your words, tone of voice and body language are always aligned. You come across more genuinely when these three elements operate in harmony together.

## 2. AVOID MIXED MESSAGES

If there is any mis-match between your words, tone of voice and body language you risk giving your audience, either a mixed message or the wrong message. The main reason for this is that people tend to accept the predominant element in your face to face communications. For example, if your body language is more dominant than your words and tone of voice, then your audience is more likely to accept the sublime messages that your body is conveying, rather than your words and tone and this may not be what you want.

## 3. OFFER A GENUINE HANDSHAKE

Giving someone a firm and friendly palm and palm handshake, with strong eye contact, is a great way to generate warmth, honesty and confidence. The best handshake of all involves you looking directly into the eyes of the other person, sliding your hand down into the web of their hand and making palm-to-palm contact and then locking your thumbs together using an equal amount of pressure.

## 4. OFFER A SINCERE SMILE

You only get to make a first impression once, so use your smile to create the best impression possible. A smile does not take much effort and the positive impact on others and yourself can be great.

**Did you know that you only use 13 facial muscles to smile and 112 muscles to frown?**

A warm and genuine smile can make you more likable and attractive. It can also convey a message of confidence and trustworthiness to others, whilst at the same time igniting your own sense of inner happiness.

**As Tony Robbins once said:  
“The quickest way to change your emotional state is to change your body language.”**

Genuine smiles emanate from the eyes. They can be identified by looking at the small crinkles around the corner of the eyes and seeing the crow's feet created by them. Smiles that are not genuine do not usually reflect such features and tend to be broken off quickly.

Excessive smiling on the other hand sends a message to others that you lack authenticity and concern for a situation. So, avoid wearing a permanent and artificial smile and try on a gentler and friendlier one.

#### **5. TAKE THE LEAD**

Strike a good balance of being friendly and approachable with a relaxed voice but at the same time exude a sense of confidence and control. So, when you are introduced to someone - stand tall with your legs slightly apart and firmly on the ground, your head straight, neck elongated and your chest slightly extended forward; as this collectively signal a sense of authority and empowerment. People who feel empowered tend to take up more space and by doing so they appear to be more in charge and dominant.

#### **6. CONSIDER MIRRORING**

Mirroring the body language of others helps to create a bond of likeability between you. To connect with them readily - practice mirroring the other person's movements, physical posture, voice, tone and tempo in a natural way. Take a mental note of whether they speak softly and/or slowly? Do they smile and laugh frequently? Are they leaning forward or backward?

#### **7. POSITIONING YOUR ARMS & LEGS**

Where you place your arms can highlight to others how open and approachable you are.

Arms crossed or folded over your chest may signal to others that you are not interested in what they are saying or that you do not agree with them. Waving them about could highlight your enthusiasm and energy, but could also signal uncertainty and a lack of confidence. Having fewer hand gestures and body movements makes you appear more intelligent and powerful to others.

So, develop a habit of placing your hands by your side as this will help you to look relaxed and confident. Practice makes perfect and soon it will become natural.

Avoid the unprofessional "figure four" leg position, which involves sitting on a chair and resting your leg or ankle on top of your other knee. It can convey a sign of resistance to what others are saying and worst of all it can make you look somewhat arrogant and superior to them.

#### **8. DEMONSTRATE CONTROL**

Strong leaders use small and subtle hand gestures to convey their points with great authority and presence. They tent their fingers to display confidence and power. Holding eye contact while speaking to others has a great impact on your ability to persuade and influence them.

Avoid behaviour that involves fidgeting, nail biting, pen chewing and/or foot tapping as these may signal a lack of control on your part. Look energised and alert during a meeting by sitting straight in your chair and avoid slumping over.

No one wants to communicate with someone who appears both unenthusiastic and tired.

#### **9. BODY ANGLE AND OBSTACLES**

**Lean your body in towards someone in order to signal to them that you are interested in what they are saying and want to hear more.**

It also demonstrates empathy and understanding. Leaning away from them indicates that you have heard enough. Nodding your head also creates engagement and highlights that you are listening and are interested in what is being said.

To convey a message of openness and engagement always remove anything which creates a barrier or obstacle between you and the other person. So:

- avoid placing your mobile phone on the table between you and the person that you are speaking to as it may sublimely tell them that: (i) that the phone is more important to you than they are; and (ii) that you would prefer to interact with your phone ahead of them;
- always step out from behind your desk when greeting someone; and
- hold your coffee or tea cup close to your waist and not high up to your face or below your waist.

The right distance between you and another person can build great rapport, so consciously focus on what makes the other person feel comfortable and relaxed. Too far away and you could look distant and too close could make you look pushy!

#### **10. GREAT FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**

Your facial expressions are a major source of information about your emotional state. They can inspire others or demotivate them. Watch your mouth movements, including pursing your lips and turning them to one side as this can highlight what you are thinking and how you and how you are feeling about a situation.

**Widening your eyes sends a welcoming expression and signals your interest in them.**

But do not roll your eyes, knot your eye-brows and /or place your hand over your mouth as these send out negative signals to your audience.

If you need to break your eye contact with someone, avoid looking down as this may suggest insecurity. Instead, try to look to the left or to the right. When talking to a few people at once, be sure to hold your gaze for two or three seconds with one person before making eye contact with the next.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Learning to speak through your own conscious and unconscious body language, will not only make a world of difference to your level of self-confidence but it will also help improve the overall quality of your personal and professional relationships. So, use the above tips to develop a more personable and valuable communication style and remember that:

**“Your body language, your eyes, your energy will come through to your audience before you even start speaking”. Peter Guber**

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